

Career education is an essential component of the total educational system, providing a sound foundation of education at the high school, community college, and adult levels for those entering the workforce or continuing on to postsecondary education. Additionally, career education is an integral part of the economic development and workforce development systems, as the economy's health relies on a well-trained and highly skilled workforce.

Career education plays a critical role in increasing student academic achievement. Research tells us that students learn in a variety of ways and that for many students relevancy is essential to engaging them in their learning, preventing them from dropping out of school or encouraging them to complete a postsecondary certificate, credential, or degree program. It will take multiple strategies to ensure that all students are able to meet the demands that the new economy places on our youth and our nation. Career education is part of the system of solutions and to ensure that truly no child is left behind.

The nation's economy is jeopardized by the significant skills gap that exists. Research by the National Alliance of Business (NAB) identified that nearly 40% of recent job applicants lack the skills necessary to performance the job for which they applied. Economic growth is stifled by this skills gap.

According to NAB, in 1993, 27% of businesses viewed the lack of skilled workers as a barrier to growth. In 1998, this number jumped to 70%. Better utilization and additional investment in Missouri's career education system can help with these challenges and assure Missouri regains its footing on the path of economic success and growth.

Career education plays an important role in economic development. Many businesses indicate that they reason they locate or re-locate to a particular state is because of the quality of its education system, including career education. Career education provides education and training for new employees and upgrading of skills for current employees. With the rate and pace of technological change, the partnership between businesses and the career education community is critical to a company's bottom line and Missouri's economic health.

Students need to learn about the options in life. By providing students with everything from career guidance, information, and exploration to career training, they are prepared for careers and further education. Many good decisions about careers or postsecondary education is enhanced by students having a plan for the career of their choice, which includes a solid understanding of the education and skills necessary to succeed in that field. In addition, not all students transition directly from high school to

postsecondary education. Some require the skills obtained in secondary program to be able to support their postsecondary education. High school should be a time to open doors to students' minds, education, and careers.

We are in a constantly changing environment. Our economy is changing. Our expectations for students are changing. How we deliver education is changing. One constant is that Missouri has the primary responsibility to provide a quality education to Missouri's students.